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*An Examination of Clausewitz's Relevance to  
the  
United States Army's Structure and Composition*

**Core Course II Essay**

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Core Course II

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The whole of military activity must therefore relate directly or indirectly to the engagement. The end for which a soldier is recruited, clothed, armed, and trained, the whole object of his sleeping, eating, drinking, and marching is simply that he should fight at the right place and the right time.

Destruction of the enemy forces is the overriding principle of war, and, so far as positive action is concerned, the principal way to achieve our object.

General von Clausewitz<sup>1</sup>

America's Army - A total force trained and ready to fight...Serving the Nation at home and abroad...A strategic force capable of decisive victory.

General Sullivan<sup>2</sup>

The quotes above convey similar themes - combat readiness is the key goal of military activity and that the overarching objective of the military, if called to fight, is to achieve a decisive victory over enemy forces. Yet, the two Generals are separated by almost two hundred years. Thus, one might suggest naively that the similarity is merely a coincidence resulting from the fact that both generals have experienced combat. However, a more sophisticated analysis would suggest that the similarities provide a shining example of how extensively Clausewitz's principles of war have been integrated into the doctrine and vision of the modern United States Army. This paper examines the relevance of Clausewitz's principles to the modern U.S. Army force structure and resource priorities. The thesis underlying this examination is that Clausewitzian concepts of training, readiness, structure, and composition remain pertinent in today's Army. To accomplish this examination, the paper will focus on four key areas: the training and education of Army forces, the concept of Regular Armies, the size of the Army, and the effect of continued downsizing on the Clausewitzian influence.

There are three areas discussed appropriately under the umbrella of training and education: combat training and readiness, levels of education, and leader development. Clausewitz addressed each of these areas.

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<sup>1</sup>Carl von Clausewitz, On War, ed. and trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976) 95, 258.

<sup>2</sup>Sullivan, Gordon R. and Michael P.W. Stone, The United States Army Posture Statement 1993, presented to the Second Session, 102nd Congress.

### *Value of Combat Experience*

Is there any lubricant that will reduce this abrasion [*general friction*]? Only one, and a commander and his army will not always have it available: combat experience.<sup>3</sup>

There are only two sources for this spirit [*military spirit*]....The first is a series of victorious wars; the second, frequent exertions of the army to the utmost limits of its strength. Nothing else will show a soldier the full extent of his capabilities. The more a general is accustomed to place heavy demands on his soldiers, the more he can depend on their response.<sup>4</sup>

One of the Army's six imperatives is "tough, realistic training." Key to adopting this imperative was the realization that the most effective fighting forces are developed by sustained combat experience. Yet, the last sustained combat experience for the Army was the Vietnam War. Thus, to achieve the requisite combat readiness while in a primarily peacetime environment, the Army moved toward realistic simulation of combat experience. It adopted extensive training schedules for its early deploying divisions and created the Combat Training Centers. In fact, one could argue that the Army has transcended Clausewitz in this area. Through technological advances, the Army can essentially provide "combat experience" in peacetime, thus increasing unit cohesion and readiness without the casualties of Clausewitz's day. Yet, there are some aspects of training that are straight "Clausewitzian", e.g., the Light Infantry Divisions practice routinely 25 mile road marches to ensure their mobility capability; a reading of Clausewitz's description of Marches provides identical guidance on the need to ensure troops can march effectively. It is interesting to note the similarities between Clausewitz and the Army leadership which adopted these training policies. Like Clausewitz, the officers who created these tough, realistic training policies were veterans of sustained combat. They remembered well the sustained warfare of Vietnam, Korea, and World War II and were determined to apply all possible lessons learned.

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<sup>3</sup>Clausewitz, 122.

<sup>4</sup>Clausewitz, 189.

### *Levels of officership*

The distinction between tactics and strategy....tactics teaches the use of armed forces in engagement; strategy, the use of engagements for the object of the war.<sup>5</sup>

Ideas will differ in accordance with the commander's area of responsibility. In the lower ranks they will be focused upon minor and more limited objectives; in the more senior, upon wider and more comprehensive ones. There are commanders-in-chief who could not have led a cavalry regiment with distinction, and cavalry commanders who could not have led armies....The knowledge needed by a senior commander is distinguished by the fact that it can only be attained by a special talent, through the medium of reflection, study, and thought.<sup>6</sup>

Clausewitz's recognition of the different skills and knowledge required at different levels of command crosswalks neatly to the Army's educational system and command structure. The Army's officer development process is based upon the philosophy that "well developed leaders are the result of progressive and sequential education, training, and experience they receive throughout their entire career."<sup>7</sup> There are essentially three levels in officer education: tactical, operational, and strategic.

At the junior command level, platoon and company commanders are trained purely in tactics, "the use of armed forces in engagement." There is no need for strategic vision at this level. At the middle level officers move from pure tactics to learning operational art, e.g., the fundamentals of strategy, the linking of tactical engagements to accomplish the overall military objectives. The senior level officer education focuses on the understanding of grand strategy, e.g., the understanding of the interrelationship between political and military objectives.

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<sup>5</sup>Clausewitz, 128.

<sup>6</sup>Clausewitz, 145-146.

<sup>7</sup>Department of the Army, DA PAM 600-3, Commissioned Officer Professional Development and Utilization, 1992 draft, 14.

Thus, Clausewitz's influence on the Army's educational system is clear. The integrity of the different levels of officership described by Clausewitz is maintained. Normally, company commanders are not taught grand strategy and have no need for such knowledge to be effective officers. Similarly, general officers are not focused on tactical training and have no need for such remedial training to be effective as grand strategists.

### *Leader Qualities*

[*Military*] Genius consists in a harmonious combination of elements....it is the inquiring rather than the creative mind, the comprehensive rather than the specialized approach, the calm rather than the excitable head to which in war we would choose to entrust the fate of our brothers and children...<sup>8</sup>

The core of Army leader development revolves around the same "military genius" qualities observed by Clausewitz. The qualities of presence of mind, ability to function under stress, ability to maintain a calm demeanor, physical fitness, and moral courage are the foundations of the officer development system in the Army. From the start of their career, officers are taught to do the right thing, e.g., " Make us choose the harder right instead of the easier wrong, and never be content with a half-truth when the whole can be won."<sup>9</sup> Throughout their careers, officers are observed for the same qualities described by Clausewitz. Indeed, the Officer Evaluation Report, which is used as a basis for promotion, includes assessments of the following characteristics: capacity to acquire knowledge/grasp concepts, maintains appropriate level of physical fitness, performs under physical and mental stress, displays sound judgment, adaptable to changing situations, and possesses military bearing and appearance.<sup>10</sup>

In looking at the similarities between Clausewitz's criteria for military genius and the Army's Evaluation System for officers, one is struck by the essentially complete adoption of

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<sup>8</sup>Clausewitz, 100-112.

<sup>9</sup>Phrase from the USMA cadet prayer. Text taken from Leadership: Quotations from the Military Tradition. Robert A. Fitton., ed., (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1990), 334.

<sup>10</sup>Source: DA Form 67-8 (1 SEP 79), US Army Evaluation Report

Clausewitz's principles into the Army's system. In fact, with the exception of the rating for "support EO/EEO", the evaluation form could have been taken from an appendix of On War.

Thus, from the examination of the three areas above, it becomes clear that the Army has assimilated Clausewitzian concepts into the core principles of training and education. Many of the time honored concepts are mirrored intact in the Army system, e.g., the dichotomy between tactics and strategy, and the value placed on military genius characteristics. In other areas, such as the Combat Training Centers, modern technology has enabled the Army to transcend Clausewitz's doctrine of true combat experience as the optimal readiness enhancement.

The next area to examine is the concept of Regular Armies versus "Reserve" Armies. Clausewitz approached this concept from two, apparently disparate viewpoints. He addressed the use of Regular Armies based on military capability as well as indirectly by addressing the value of the people's will in an armed conflict.

### *Military Virtue*

Military virtues [*bravery, adaptability, stamina, and enthusiasm*] are found only in regular armies, and they are the ones that need them most....Generally speaking, the need for military virtues becomes greater the more the theater of operations and other factors tend to complicate the war and disperse the forces.<sup>11</sup>

### *Public Support - The People in Arms*

When a whole nation renders armed resistance, the question then is no longer, "Of what value is this to the people," but "what is its potential value, what are the conditions that it requires, and how is it to be utilized."<sup>12</sup>

In examining the Army's force structure in light of Clausewitz's principle of regular armies as the holders of military virtue, and by implication, as the most effective fighting forces, it appears at first glance that the Army has bypassed the Clausewitz maxims. The current Army

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<sup>11</sup>Clausewitz, 188.

<sup>12</sup>Clausewitz, 479.

military force structure contains less than 50 percent Regular Army. Does this demonstrate a rejection of Clausewitzian concepts? A superficial analysis says yes. However, as one examines the issue more deeply, it becomes clear that the Army has indeed integrated Clausewitz's principle of regular armies into its force structure design. However, akin to moving from Plato's ideal world as described in The Republic and into Aristotle's real world as described in his Politics, the Army has taken the "ideal" Clausewitz concept and applied fiscal reality to it.<sup>13</sup> It should be noted that the ability to compose the Army in this manner is a luxury afforded the United States by its geographical location - defense of its borders is not a likely wartime scenario for the Army. In contrast, Clausewitz wrote from a perspective of a continental conflict where rapid mobilization in defense of homeland was essential.

In essence, to provide the most effective fighting force, while retaining the passion of the people, and while meeting the fiscal constraints imposed by Congress, the Army has developed a force structure that is based upon prudent risk. The quick deploying Army units, which must be combat ready on a moment's notice, are comprised of Regular Army units. The later deploying units, which have time to build unit cohesion and military virtues, are primarily made up of Reserve Army units.

Thus, upon close examination, one sees that the Army has linked the superficially disparate Clausewitzian concept of regular armies with his concept of the will and passion of the people. By linking the effectiveness of the regular armies with the popular support engendered by mobilizing reserve units, the Army can produce an effective fighting force while operating in an austere resource environment.

The third area to be examined is the size and composition of the Army. Clausewitz addressed this notion from several perspectives: the size of the army, the branches of service, and the activities of the army devoted only to preparation for war.

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<sup>13</sup>William Ebenstein, Great Political Thinkers Plato to the Present, 4th Ed. (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1969. See Plato's "The Republic" and Aristotle's "Politics".



### *Superiority of Numbers*

It thus follows that as many troops as possible should be brought into the engagement at the decisive point....The first rule, therefore, should be: put the largest possible army into the field.<sup>14</sup>

### *Branches of Service*

...only discuss the three main branches: infantry, cavalry, and artillery....Infantry is the main branch of the service; the other two are supplementary.<sup>15</sup>

### *Activities of War*

...concerned with maintenance alone, consists of supply, medical services, and maintenance of arms and equipment....those [activities] that are merely preparations for war.<sup>16</sup>

Examination of this area reveals the Army's divergence from Clausewitz's concepts of how to structure an army. The Army does not subscribe to the concept of placing the largest possible Army into the field. To illustrate, while the Army is operating with an Active Duty end strength of 536,000, almost 40 percent of these military spaces are devoted to non-deployable, non-tactical activities. Even allowing for modernization, technological advances, and modern army concerns (e.g., quality of life programs), this ratio of 60 percent deployable to 40 percent non-deployable cannot be rationalized as a Clausewitzian model.

Similarly, one can extrapolate from Clausewitz's discussion of the service branches that the "combat arms" branches are the heart of the army. The 100 percent combat arms branches in the Army are Infantry, Armor, Artillery, Air Defense Artillery, and Special Forces. If Clausewitz's concepts held true in the Army, one would expect these branches to form the bulk of the Army. In fact, these officers account for only 30 percent of the Army, and only about one third of the

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<sup>14</sup>Clausewitz, 195.

<sup>15</sup>Clausewitz, 285-291.

<sup>16</sup>Clausewitz, 129-131.

enlisted are classified in tactical occupational groups (i.e., infantry, gun crews).<sup>17</sup> Clearly, an army which devotes only one third of its forces to combat arms is not cast in an Clausewitzian mold. Even allowing for technological advances and modernization since Clausewitz's day, it is unreasonable to posture a ratio of one third combat arms to two thirds combat support as a Clausewitzian ideal.

One can infer from the tone of Clausewitz's writings regarding the activities of an army that an army should devote the majority of its resources to the "go-to-war" activity, not the preparation for war activities. In fact, if one examines the Army end strength capable of deployment (approximately 472,000 of the 536,000 mentioned above), approximately 30 percent is devoted to preparation for war activities. If the Army civilian population is factored in, the ratio grows to approximately 60 percent of the Army's active personnel are devoted to preparation for war activities. These ratios demonstrate that vast amounts of resources are devoted to preparation for war as opposed to go-to-war activities.

Thus, one cannot argue convincingly that the Army has adopted or transcended Clausewitz in this area. Rather, due to the United States' view of the Army as not simply a professional military corps, but as a social and cultural institution in its own right (e.g., the Army has evolved from a purely military focus to an organization responsible for retirees, other service support, and support of all Army dependents) the Army has rejected a pure Clausewitz go-to-war focus.

Examination of the three areas above leads to the conclusion that, in terms of size and structure, the Army does not fit a Clausewitzian paradigm. There are simply too few resources devoted to the pure combat portions of the Army.

The final area to be examined is the future. What impact will the Army's continued downsizing have on Clausewitz's influence on it? It appears that continued downsizing and fiscal

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<sup>17</sup>Medlock, Kathleen Van Trees. A critical analysis of the impact of the Department of Defense Reorganization Act on American officership. Diss. George Mason University, 1993. (Ann Arbor: UMI, 1993 9333192), 82. (Officer data) United States General Accounting Office, Defense Force Management Occupation Distribution and Composition (GAO/NSIAD-92-85, Mar 23, 1992), 17. (Enlisted data)

reductions could have the effect of virtually rejecting the wisdom of Clausewitz's advice in regards to Army structure, except in the areas of levels of officership and leader qualities.

In the area of training and education, "realistic, tough training" is a prime target for budget reductions. Deploying soldiers for extended periods of realistic training is expensive. The Army could well be forced to rely almost exclusively on computer simulations for training exercises. Advancing technology will be able to create realistic scenarios. However, there is no substitute for unit level exercises. If tough, realistic training is reduced, the Clausewitzian maxim of the value of combat experience will have been rejected.

Continued downsizing should not affect the manner in which the Army differentiates tactics from strategy, nor should it impact the qualities valued in leaders. Thus, remnants of Clausewitz will remain in the training and education area.

The Clausewitz influence on the concept of Regular versus Reserve Armies stands to change dramatically as a result of continued downsizing. Due to political pressures, the Army will likely be forced to (1) shift more combat, early deploying missions to the Reserve Component and (2) maintain a larger Reserve Component at the expense of the Active Component. These actions could force a serious decline in the combat readiness of the Army. Further, it would demonstrate a rejection of Clausewitz's principle of the strengths of Regular Armies versus Reserve Armies.

In regards to the size and composition, the Army will shift even further away from a Clausewitzian paradigm of strength in the go-to-war sectors. To date the Army's combat arms units have been reduced at a disproportionately higher rate than the rest of the Army. It is not known whether this trend will continue.

A final observation worth noting is the impact several more years will have on the Army's leadership -- which sets army policies and doctrines. As highlighted earlier, the leaders who have structured today's Army were, similar to Clausewitz, veterans of sustained combat. In several more years, the last veterans of sustained combat will retire. In their place will be veterans of the "war of perfect conditions", i.e., Desert Storm which had a long lead time, a long planning phase, a successful coalition alliance, a large resource base, popular support, and a short combat phase.

It is interesting to ponder whether the lack of personal experience with the horrors and dangers of sustained combat will result in the Army's future leaders having a lack of appreciation of Clausewitzian wisdom.

In conclusion, Clausewitz's principles are currently alive and well in several facets of Army structure. His concepts remain applicable in the Army's structure of training and education. His concepts of Regular versus Reserve Armies remain cogent in the Army's Total Force Policy. However, his principles are no longer integral to the Army's size and composition. It remains to be seen how valid Clausewitzian principles will be in the future. It appears that his influence will diminish in conjunction with the Army's downsizing.

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